

THE STARFLOWER MANIFESTO

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PART I-INTRODUCTION

Are you an artist interested in finding or creating a small synergy-based in-person group that offers individual growth and explosive creativity?

Are you a neurodivergent person interested in expressing yourself and finding a safe space for your natural neurological style to be embraced?

Is your head full of unconventional or fundamentally new ideas that you would like to see enacted?

Do you have trouble making friendships or connections in mainstream society, or do you find its pressures to be “too much?”

I have asked myself all of these questions, and I do not doubt that others have. Maybe you are reading this because you have asked yourself these questions. Maybe you are reading this and only asking yourself these things for the first time. Whatever the case may be, I wrote this manifesto to answer all of those questions.

In this manifesto, I intend to outline a solution to the above questions. While for the most part the questions can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”, everyone’s *solution* to the problems which lead one to ask these questions is different.

I write this for people who are everywhere, yet are seen almost nowhere. People who exist, yet who are mostly unknown. People that by and large don’t even know about each other-until we reach out.

We are the weirdos, the introverts, the rebels, the nonconformists, the creatives, the radicals. We are the people whose brains naturally do not operate within the structures of society at large and conventional thinking. We are the people who choke on the heat inside our chests when we are told what to do. We are the people who out of our inherent disposition do not align with the societies we were born into and raised within. We are the people whose creativity and individuality leads us to chase our conscience and explode into fantastic and immortal works of art. We are the people who will not be stopped despite immense pressure. We are the people who are torn between love and hate as we love the things we do but hate the fact that there are so few people who are like us that we know of. We are the people who just want to do things in our own way.

Whatever we may think of ourselves or others think of us, one thing is true-we exist, we always have, and always will. And we will not be stopped. To that point, it is time now that we find a way to find each other organically. It is time that we know how to find each other and know how to connect with each other and grow together. I wrote this manifesto to explain why and how. I will give a trigger warning that the following content contains descriptions of depression, isolation, ableism, and anti-Autism discrimination. I also very briefly mention bullying and forms of sensory input that some people may find disturbing.

PART II-ACCEPTING NEURODIVERGENCE AND CREATING SPACES FOR NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS

The root of all human social and behavioral differences begins in the brain.

This means that neurodivergent people naturally will not conform to what is perceived as typical. It follows that neurodivergent people experience increased hardship in interactions with other people and greater society because of their natural brain type. However, it also follows that, if they are nurtured and grown in the company of like-(or perhaps unlike-)brained people who validate them, they can develop a separate culture of their own, one in which they experience feelings of validation rather than exclusion and separation.

This article is not about scientific research, it's about lived experiences and solutions to problems. I state several of my own experiences in order to validate people who have had similar experiences, and I discuss several of my ideas for solutions. When speaking on behalf of a group of people, I only use the word "we" if I fall into said group or the factor(s) which define that group also apply to me.

While non-typical brain types such as Autism and ADH¹ are usually no longer seen as "bad", outward expressions of them, such as an autistic child's repetitive playing style, an ADH person's hyperfocusing on a particular subject, or a person with sensory difficulties' objection to various forms of input, often are. It's very important to make that distinction.

As an Autistic, Synesthetic, Alexithymic and ADH person, I have experienced a great degree of psychological and emotional separation from the world around me, despite having lived in it and interacted with it physically my entire life. To use an idiomatic expression, it felt as though I was "physically in this world, but not of it." Moreover, I and doubtless other people have experienced the social, emotional, and psychological equivalent of *taxation without representation*.

Why is this? From my perspective and the perspective of others who have faced this great tribulation, we are emotionally and psychologically taxed with having to follow a set of rules and norms. We are taxed with the expectation of fitting into a certain understanding of "normal", without receiving the benefits of acceptance, friends, and an internal sense of success and thriving-all forms of representation in society and enjoyments in life. Yes, we may be *functioning*, but that doesn't mean we're *thriving*. We're hurting, even if we don't say it out loud.

¹ "ADHD" stands for "attention deficit hyperactivity *disorder*". Since ADH is a difference as opposed to a neurological malfunction, in my view it is both scientifically inaccurate and highly insulting to people with ADH to say "ADHD." This likewise applies to acronyms of neurotypes that end in the word "disorder" or "disease." In my view and in the view of the neurodiversity acceptance movement (as well as an increasing number of professionals today), these are not disorders but natural variations in brain function. In my view at least, the word "disorder" only applies when a neurological condition is universally maladaptive, i.e., there are *only* negative aspects and no good aspects to such a condition. Even then "disability" is a far more polite and far more accurate term.

Moreover, many neurodivergent people have either been trained or have subconsciously trained themselves to “act normally”—a phenomenon known as masking. Why? This is because of the belief that neurodivergent people will have an easier or more successful life if they “act more normally.” Though externally the life of a person of neurodivergence may look pleasant, internally, many neurodivergent people to whom this is done are suffering. If you asked them, they would respond by saying that they are hurting, and how can a person be truly successful and hurting at the same time?

Many times, I have been told “you’re doing great!” when I acted “normally”, and even told to not worry because I’m “almost normal.” I don’t want to be normal! Plus, if I adopted more neurotypical traits, cut out more neurodivergent traits, and acted in a way that is societally considered to be normal, I would not be “getting better”—people are so much more than just their external appearances to others! Quite to the contrary, I would be getting worse! All of these types of language and more are results of looking at autism as something bad—which results in the false notion that having “less Autism” means that you are “better.”

Being “typical” isn’t any better than being neurodivergent—not in the slightest! Neither is it an ideal and neither does it mean that one is more capable than a neurodivergent person. I’m not “missing out” on fun things and opportunities that neurotypical people enjoy—I have a different set of things that I need, that I like, and that I enjoy. And no, I’m not “doing great” unless and until I can fully act upon my neurotype in every sense of the word.

This leads me to the discovery of a major problem—people of neurological minorities are socially expected to act as though they are neurotypical, but people who are neurotypical are not expected to act “more Autistic” or “more ADH-like” or “more Tourette’s-like” or whatever else the neurological minority may be. This is the ugly underbelly of the societal norms that to varying degrees we all follow. Doesn’t that make you think of your own experiences or the experiences of a person or people you know? Doesn’t that make you reconsider what you believe and what you implicitly support through your actions? This is what I and countless other Autistic and neurodivergent people have to live with every single day—a double standard in which some people’s way of doing things is prized as the (unnatural, unhealthy, and unrealistic) ideal to which all must conform.

The idea that neurotypical behavior, mannerisms, and self-expression are “right” and that others “need to be fixed²” is itself a form of ableism—the belief that some people (and/or their traits) are superior to others based on physical or mental ability. My Autistic traits and behaviors, likes, dislikes, and interests are not “bad”, “weird”, or “problematic”, and neither are those associated with my other forms of neurodivergence. Quite to the contrary, they are essential to my identity. If that’s not enough, it is flat out *wrong* to hold ableist beliefs—they’re untrue, inaccurate, and hurt

² Let’s differentiate between additional support, brain training, and skill building and something which looks similar but is entirely different—minimization or suppression of neurodiverse or “treating someone out” of said traits. The first way is good, beneficial, and helps the person. The second way damages and can even destroy the person.

innocent people. Ableism hurts people. Neurodivergent people *must* be accepted precisely as they are.

If Autism really is a disease or a disorder, Autistic people would not have a single strength that is unique to them. Yet, while Autistic people have weaknesses unique to their neurotype, they also have strengths which no typical person could even fathom.

We are all normal, yet we are all different.

You might say “Yeah that sucks. The world is unfair. You’ve just got to learn to live with it.” No! Why learn to live with or adapt something that is unfair? Why should you support an unfair and harmful mentality with your actions? No, no, and no! Regardless of your neurotype, it is positively necessary that you, I, and everyone else directly act upon the characteristics of our neurotypes without masking, anxiety, or shame. It's futile and ultimately harmful to try to change, alter, mask, or anything short of fully accept a neurodivergent person's “unusual” behavior. Since people are what they are and their neurotypes are essential to their identity, instead of focusing our energy on making us follow an ever-longer list of social norms, why don't we teach acceptance of neurodiversity-in all of its forms-instead?

Instead of trying to make neurodivergent people appear more normal, let's teach neurotypical-and neurodivergent-people to accept, understand, and be educated about people of all neurotypes.

Naturally, one asks as I have multiple times, “Is there any hope?” To which the answer comes back in no unclear terms “Yes, there is hope.” However, this statement only applies if we are willing to create a place where hope-and thus ourselves as human beings-can be nurtured. This is why people of neurodivergence and particularly artists of neurodivergence need an alternative, another option, another way of being, perhaps even a counterculture, as some might have it.

Why counterculture? Because as people of neurodivergence and even in some cases for neurotypical people, conformity is our enemy.

To start with, imagine being born into a world where you didn't know why other kids picked on you and played with you in ways that made you uncomfortable, why others could not stand the you make friends and how you communicate socially, where you felt a profound degree of separation from society at large, where others did not understand you and dismissed your legitimate complaints as nonsense-which is why you closed up on yourself and refused to talk and share your needs even when necessary. A world where you saw yourself and your behavior as normal, healthy, and beautiful, but others saw your behavior as weird, bad, or even pathological-until you began to think the same of yourself. A world where you felt shame and anxiety around your autistic and otherwise atypical traits which gradually became a form of subconscious self-hatred and self-gaslighting. A world in which you heard the name of your neurological classification used as a synonym for “stupid” and even as a slur against your people. A world in which you for years vehemently denied your own neurotype (and needs

associated therewith) after hearing and seeing it being slandered as a disease that consists purely of deficits in normal. A world in which, for one reason or another, and probably multiple at any given time, you felt the need to mask your neurodiversity and didn't even realize that's what you were doing and how truly damaging it was until *way* after the fact. This has been my experience and the experience of countless other Autistic and neurodivergent individuals.

An Autistic high school student put it best "People don't suffer from Asperger's (a form of Autism). They suffer because they're depressed from being left out and beat up all the time."³ It's not Autism or neurodivergence that causes suffering. It's societal attitudes toward neurodivergence and how neurodivergent people are treated that cause enormous pain and suffering for so many of us-including myself. It's societal norms that are built without people whose brains function differently in mind. My brain did not cause me to suffer-not even one bit. In society, the way my brain worked was treated in different ways, but so many of them caused me to suffer (refer to paragraphs above "why counterculture?..." for more detail). The fact that I got bullied by other people *largely for being Autistic* was only a manifestation of a much larger problem: Society was-and is-that bully.

I think back to when I initially accepted that I am Autistic. As I pondered the consequences of this enormous discovery, it dawned on me that I can be a happy and fully authentic Autistic person who does not hide a single one of their natural neurodivergent traits, or be a fake and extremely hurt neurotypical shell that changes its behavior to fit into society while remaining unaccepted for who I am. Since I am not at all normal, back when I used to pretend to be "normal" I felt a great sense of nervousness and stiffness and I felt the need to justify to myself why I am doing what I am doing. That's when it hit me: Being different is bad. Being Autistic is bad. Being *me* is *bad*. But no. None of that is true, not even one bit. Being "normal" is enormously burdensome, and to compare myself to "normal", to try to be "normal", and to hold myself to standards of "normality" would be the same as learned helplessness and would be the same as to mercilessly beat myself up. All I want to be able to do is to openly be Autistic in the full sense of all of what that means and be 100% loved and accepted for that.

Have you ever heard the saying "question authority and think for yourself?" As an Autistic person, my brain naturally does-and always has done-just that. My brain will accept rules that make logical or personal/emotional sense to me and that it agrees with, but it will not accept anything that is arbitrary. It naturally acts according to the way things should be and not the way things are. I don't know how many people can relate, but doubtless some can, and I am certain that we all have suffered from following so many rules but receiving so little of the benefits of being part of society.

Moreover, the traditional marker of identity has always been the notion of homeland or where one is *from*-a notion that persists even to this day, especially with minority groups. There are ethnic, religious, and cultural/linguistic minorities-who are located in a given society and comprise a minority in the larger society and often have a strengthened sense of identity as

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/20/health/how-about-not-curing-us-some-autistics-are-pleading.html>

a result. For instance, take Puerto Ricans in the mainland U.S., speakers of non-Mandarin languages in China, and indigenous peoples of various places around the world. All of those groups are tied to a specific place or tradition from which they take their identity.

However, such is not the case with *neurological* minorities. Neurological minorities are scattered around the world-but people of neurological minorities very often feel profoundly different from the societies, cultures, and times in which they live. On top of that, being part of a neurological minority does not automatically mean that one's parents were also neurodiverse.

We neurodivergent people don't have a homeland and neither do many of us affiliate with the cultures of our physical homelands. We need something more. Sometimes, breaking free from and transcending the time and place into which one is born is necessary for self-actualization-the creation of one's own identity based *not* on homeland, heritage, or family, but rather *who one is* and *who/what one chooses*.

However, that has not always been an option for me and people like me.

Yet, there is a solution.

As I envision it, this solution will be a place for people of neurodivergence (and even perhaps neurotypical people) to find, grow, and explore their identities. This solution will be a place where neurodivergent people will not have to mask their innate and beautiful traits of thought, word, and action, but can express them to the fullest degree in the company of people who do not judge, mock, or un-necessarily restrain. This solution will be a place where people will not have to experience people touching them from behind their back, pinecones, and loud, sudden, and scary noises-all of which scared and hurt me since I was a small child.

As someone who is a young person as of this writing, I think especially but not exclusively of young people. This solution will be a place where teenagers and young adults can find a transitional phase between the world of their parents and family (childhood) and the real world of adulthood. This world will be the world of their friends and peers-a place where natural teenage emotions such as angst, rebellion, and bombast are honored and expressed honestly. This solution will be a place where teenagers and young people, especially but not exclusively neurodivergent ones, while they are still developing, will be able to grow surrounded by friends and people and things that they like and choose-rather than overload of their developing nervous and executive function systems and the feeling of not being able to express their non-mainstreamness and nonconformity. This solution will be a place for all members, regardless of age, to engage in radical visibility and to blatantly project who and what they are so that they can signal to other people who they are and thus find other people like them. This solution will indeed be a community-but a community of individuality.

PART III-The role of art within this movement

There is a common saying that “art is subjective.” While it undoubtedly is, what is meant by this saying is that people seek and like art that *validates them*.

In an era where we are swamped with all kinds of information and input, artistic and otherwise, it is as a result increasingly hard to find art that validates us and even harder to find artistic people and community that validates our experiences while simultaneously allowing us to be ourselves and pursue our own interests. I want to create a space where people can see, hear, and experience things AND people that validate them-not just things and not just people.

Additionally, an area where I want to fill in a gap where other scenes and movements have failed is to create a space for *all* forms of art. For instance, the punk rock scene in the 1980s primarily consisted of punk music and short pamphlets called *zines*. The Pop Art movement which reached its height mid-20th-century New York was primarily centered around certain forms of visual art-notably satirical posters and parodies of soup cans. The Bloomsbury Group in Edwardian London entirely consisted of writers.

My movement is not about this art form or that art form or this technique or that technique. How can art and artists move forward without the encouragement of all forms of art?

This leads me to my next point-I intend to create an open, free, and common environment for the sharing of artwork and creative ideas. Not only will this increase the quality of the work, it will ideally increase the quantity as well because of the access to support that artists have for themselves and that they give to each other.

From experience, this artistic community is something that I have needed and wanted for several years now. I need a place where people can introduce me to different art forms. I don't always want to have to pay money to take a class with an instructor who I don't know and don't always understand, and I don't want to have to “wait until later” when it comes to the development of a creative idea in a medium I'm not familiar with.

I want an easy, accessible introduction to multiple different forms of art through people that I'm familiar with and who practice those forms of art on the same or similar level to me.

I want to be able to save money on art supplies through lending and borrowing to and from my friends. I also not only want to be exposed to other people's interests so that I can further develop my own, but also want to help people further develop their ideas and partake in their interests. All of this increases both the quantity and quality of artwork. A group of people that is large enough to be taken seriously but small enough such that each person's individuality is honored makes it easier to empower the unempowered, make the invisible visible, try the untried, and do the undone-all four of which are goals of a Starflower.

This extends to artistic and entertainment media that people *consume*, not just create. For example, I personally rely on friend recommendations for books, art, video games, and places

to find those things. I have difficulty choosing if I don't know where to start. A Starflower group should be able to solve this problem as well.

One of the many strengths of neurodivergent individuals is their artistic advantage. Many scientific studies have correlated high degrees of artistic ability to neurodivergence. Speaking from experience, I have friends who have ADHD who have a seemingly unlimited supply of artistic ideas. Though I as an Autistic person often have trouble coming up with ideas outside of my specific interest areas or "hyperfixations", I definitely am much more artistically inclined than many of my neurotypical friends and peers.

Part of the reason why this may be the case is that neurodivergent people actually sense the world around them-and themselves-differently. For instance, I hear music and smell smells as colors. I may tell you a certain song is "blue" or "orange" because that's how it sounds to me. I may say something smells "brown" or even that it smells "open." My point is that not only are many neurodivergent individuals who are artistically inclined, art is an easy method of self-expression that does not require certification or qualification at all levels, and art is a powerful tool for people of neurodivergence to show their experiences *in the way* that they experience them. This not only leads to a proliferation of artwork, but also the use of a creative mentality in the understanding and doing of things that are not art.

I envision this space as a space where art is not necessarily produced for commercial purposes. While it is okay to sell or commission one's artwork in exchange for money, I believe that it is one's personal decision to do or not do this. Unfortunately, in many spaces, true artistic quality has been compromised in favor of monetary gain-which leads to creative control of artwork by someone other than the artist. This is especially common in the world of recorded music. I want to stop all of that and put creative and financial control exclusively in the hands of the artist(s) and their collaborator(s).

I moreover cherish the idea that if art is indeed subjective, it follows that what makes the most artistic "sense" to the artist and what the artist likes best will *also* be subjective. Beauty is not a concept that can be defined by lowering it to the level of standardization or tradition, and neither can art. The ancient question of "what is art?" will always have a different answer depending on the person. Individuality is what makes art so beautiful.

Rather than seeing painting, drawing, playing a musical instrument, or writing as a discipline, my movement is one in which all these things and indeed all art forms are a method of authentic self-expression and individuality, however unorthodox they may be. Yes, you should learn about different artistic techniques and methods. But you should be the one choosing what to do or not do, and above all, it must be natural.

My last point about creating an artistic counterculture explores how those two elements intertwine. Firstly, many artists, historically as well as present, see or have seen themselves as fundamentally different or unlike other people-and I'm sure you can name a few examples. Secondly, art is in many ways a domain of culture and in many ways the highest expression of

culture. It makes sense that those who are creating culture don't follow it as it is. Thirdly, being artistic requires rejection of restraint of potential possibilities. This behavior can translate itself into rejection of some societal norms.

Whether you choose to do creative writing, painting, drawing, prints, woodwork, sculpture, video game design and TTRPGs, graphic design, digital art, or animation, 3D printing, music, food, clothing/fabric/textiles, crafts that serve both an artistic and practical function, cosplay and LARP, coding, technology design, or other computer-based arts or something entirely else, good for you. This space is yours.

PART IV-Having a bottom-up and chaotic approach to societal construction as opposed to a top-down or lawful approach

While the words “culture” and its antonym “counterculture” can be useful terms, perhaps it’s best to think of these concepts in broader language. “Counterculture” means “going against the culture” and “opposite of the mainstream culture”, and “culture” typically means the dominant way of being in a given time and place, which includes food, language, arts, and normative mannerisms, amongst other things.

How do we think of the deeper motivational factors at hand behind these two phenomena without resorting to defining them as the opposite of the other? What’s really going on with people who identify with “culture” and what’s really going on with people who identify with “counterculture?”

Let’s look at it first on the individual level. Perhaps the table-top role-playing game Dungeons And Dragons describes it best when it gives player characters the option of adopting a “lawful” or a “chaotic” temperament⁴. In D&D terms, “lawful” means using the law, authority, society, and tradition as the reference point for your own behavior and words and as the standard for societally expected behavior.

“Chaotic” on the other hand means using your own personal conscience, universal ethical principles, and your own logical reasoning and emotional attachment as a reference point for your behavior. A chaotic person understands that the rules lawful people follow are not immortal or absolute-just like the people who made those rules. A chaotic person understands that a better world is always possible, and that it’s their ethical responsibility to others and personal responsibility to themselves to introduce their ideas and beliefs to the world through directly acting upon them.

How do chaotic and lawful alignments come together on larger levels of group and societal organization? Lawful people organize their societies in a “top-down” fashion, chaotic people organize their societies in a “bottom-up” fashion. A top-down societal structure views people as parts of society. Top-down societies are structured, hierarchical, hard to change, and expect people to fit into them. Top-down societies rely on structures to connect people, but can become highly alienating with their use of hierarchy and assignment of societal roles. Top-down societies expect people to be “lawful” and have formal codes of legal law.

Bottom-up societies are less structured, non-hierarchical, easy to change, and people collectively create them not by conforming to a preset structure, but simply by virtue of existing in the same space and then forming connections with other people based on personal emotional attachment or commonality.

Interestingly, a bottom-up structure very closely aligns with my worldview as an Autistic person⁵. I and other Autistic people tend to have bottom-up and detail-first thinking-when it comes to

⁴ Crawford, Jeremy et al. *D&D Player’s Handbook*, Wizards Of The Coast, 2014, page 122

⁵ <https://psychcentral.com/autism/why-people-with-autism-are-more-logical#next-steps>

looking at society, each “detail” is a person. For me, an ideal society is a connect-the-dots drawing template in a coloring book-except those dots are people who connect themselves into an abstract, beautifully complex and yes, *chaotic* web.

The Starflower ethos is chaotic and bottom-up-and that means that Starflowers do not have one leader. Starflowers are technically *leaderless*. However, a Starflower group is really *leaderful*. Why? Every single Starflower is a leader of themselves. Through this, Starflowers strive to create non-hierarchical ways of being, creating, and cooperating as opposed to merely competing. Besides, how do people change the world without acting differently?

Starflower is arranged from the bottom-up and is filled with chaotic people. Imagine the unlimited potential, energy, individuality, and creativity that can come from that!

PART V-THE MEANING OF OUR NAME AND SYMBOLISM OF STARS AND FLOWERS

Our name, the Starflowers, comes obviously from a combination of the words “star” and “flower.” But what does each word signify in the context of the core values of this manifesto and the movement it serves as a foundation for?

Let’s start with discussing stars.

1. The star is the basic unit of the universe. Clusters, certain nebulae, and entire galaxies and multi/super-galactic groups are made from stars. All elements higher in number than iron (26) were fused in supernovae-the explosive collapse of heavy stars⁶. Likely, only hydrogen (some say also helium or perhaps lithium) existed at the time of the Big Bang-meaning that every other element formed in stellar cores⁷. Stars make up everything (clusters, constellations, and galaxies) that are larger than them, and everything that is smaller than stars is made of or somehow connected to “star stuff” (unless it was directly formed by the Big Bang). In the same way that stars are the primary unit of the universe through creating “star stuff” and forming networks of stars, we humans strive to do the same through making creative work and forming networks of people-as well as be the basic units of creativity, individuality, new ideas, and forwardness of thought and action.
2. To point one about connecting together-stars form constellations and clusters, and even on large scales, galaxies. They are often born in nebulae. But do they lose any of their individual brightness? No. A “community” of stars is predicated solely on the individual brightness of each star. If stars were people, star clusters would have a bottom-up arrangement.
3. “Star” is also a reference to Stargirl Caraway, the main character of the eponymous Jerry Spinelli novel about nonconformity and creativity. What made Stargirl a “star person” were her stellar qualities described in 1 and 2, as well as her free-spiritedness and brightness. Stargirl exemplified and personified what fans of Dungeons and Dragons might call “chaotic goodness.” This means her definition of goodness and beauty was not predicated on societal norms, mainstream culture, authority, or tradition-her definition of being good and doing and surrounding herself things that were beautiful was not externally defined but rather guided by her connection with sublimity, subjectivity, emotion, and her own conscience.
Stargirl showed many behaviors similar to ADHD and Autism, and while the novel does not address neurodivergence, I do not doubt that Stargirl would greatly appreciate the neurodivergence movement if she was a real person.

⁶Stott, Carole, Sparrow, Giles, and Dinwiddie, Robert. *Space: From Earth To The Edge Of The Universe*, DK Publishers, 2010, page 248

⁷ Stott, Carole, Sparrow, Giles, and Dinwiddie, Robert. *Space: From Earth To The Edge Of The Universe*, DK Publishers, 2010, pages 249 and 313

Flowers

1. Flowers have figured prominently in art in all cultures and civilizations since ancient times. Though flowers are sensitive and fragile, they are (with very limited exceptions) universally regarded as extremely beautiful.
2. Flowers come in a massive variety of colors, shapes, sizes, and petal numbers, just like humans and their brains do.
3. Flowers represent nature and nearness to it, and thus integration with the natural world and care for the environment.
4. Flowers were associated with notable prior counterculture movements, such as hippies and back-to-the-land anti-technology movements that were related to them (which were usually secular, unlike the Amish or Mennonites). Flowers also figured importantly in the 19th-century counterculture of Romanticism, and through it, Romanticism's American counterpart-Transcendentalism.
5. Because flowers are beautiful even though they are sensitive or fragile, some people may be able to see their own characteristics in the characteristics of a flower. The musician and poet Rozz Williams is quoted as saying "Every pretty flower, every lovely flower, every deadly flower, hides its light inside of shame."
What did he mean by this? In one way one can see the word "flower" as the metaphor for an artist. Think about it. Art and nature (of which flowers are part) are welcoming, hostile, and deeply fragile all at the same time, and the same can often be said of a person who embodies art (an artist).
More figuratively, and I don't know how many people can relate to this, I, as an artist, am rather reserved. I have a tendency to hide my "light" (talent) inside of "shame" (personal qualms, past traumas, and anxiety).

PART VI- Practical advice

Starting a club, movement, or informal group at your school, college, or workplace is an excellent way to unite people and create meaningful, creative revolution in daily life on both small and large scales. Thankfully, there are several ways to go about this.

GETTING STARTED-

- First, directly distribute this manifesto yourself. Hand copies out to friends or people who are potentially interested. Tell your people to copy the manifesto and distribute it further. Put copies in a public place where they can easily be accessed. In the digital context, emailing, texting, and DMing digital copies get the same job done.
- Talk about it! This is an excellent way to disseminate Starflowerism and Starflower ideas and maybe even a chance to spread this pamphlet or talk about your activities in your group. Find a way to bring up the Starflower Manifesto or what you and other Starflowers have been doing recently.
- Find people who don't have friends or who have few friends. Movements and groups that largely consist of people who feel "other", "weird", "different" or that they "can't fit in" often arise between people who can't form connections in mainstream society because their values or interests are not mainstream or because society has alienated them-both of which have applied to me at varying points throughout my life.

PUBLICITY-

- Write "STARFLOWER", "STARFLOWER MANIFESTO", or similar things with sidewalk chalk in public places.
- Guerrilla marketing, public performance/flash mobs, and wearing Starflower-made apparel in public.
- Openly identify as a Starflower. You, and if you have any, your collaborator(s) may choose to connect this to your artwork. I personally choose to do this and I frequently tell people that I know or regularly see about Starflower.

ONCE YOU ARE STARTED-

As a Starflower, you will (a) create artwork on your own (b) create art together, whether you are simply working in the same space or working collaboratively on the same thing and (c) discuss your creative ideas, neurodivergent experiences, and interests. I hope that as a result of (a), (b), and (c), you are able to (d) become friends with the people in your group.

Because people are different and all have their own methods of work, communication, and relaxation, it's important for Starflowers to decide how they want to run and organize themselves, which will naturally come about as time continues. For this reason, a growth mindset and open and honest communication is critically necessary. However, it is important to maintain the informal and organic nature of association between group members even as a mature group and even in places where there are a lot of Starflowers.

Generally speaking, the size of each Starflower group should remain at somewhere between three and ten people. This is done in order to maximize the benefit of working with a group while

also keeping emphasis on the individuality of members and bottom-up construction which I discussed earlier. A Starflower group should rely on direct communication between all members as well as a non-hierarchical approach to producing art and collaborating. It should never be controlled or taken over by one member of the group. Starflower groups (not to mention individual Starflowers from the same or different groups!) can and should work together.

Each Starflower group will be different, and each Starflower will identify with different aspects of the Starflower Manifesto and will bring their own experiences, neurotype, and favorite activities into the Starflower group they become part of. That is okay! This manifesto is meant to provide some guidelines as well as some resources for those who may be interested in exploring different aspects of Starflowerism. But ultimately, Starflower is what you want it to be.

Allow individual artist(s) and collaborator(s) to decide if/how they want to manage copyright and monetization-related matters but in general, keep resources common and open-source. Please be aware and sensitive to accommodations, food allergies, and sensory aversions of group members and do not touch people unless they say it's ok.

PART VII-Further reading

- Stargirl, Jerry Spinelli. This novel discusses a girl who starts her own movement and her motivations. I strongly recommend this book. If you are only able to read one work of literature on this list, pick this one.
- Prometheus Unbound, Percy Bysshe Shelley. This book is an epic poem which highlights themes of nonconformity, freedom, knowledge, the imagination, the arts, and the sublime. It is also an early example of modern literature with a pro-environmental emphasis
- Riot Grrrl Manifesto, Kathleen Hanna. This one-page manifesto boldly states the author's intention to create an art movement as a means for women and girls to express and liberate themselves. Warning: two instances of profanity.
- Unmasking As Autistic Pride, Michelle Sara. This poem describes the experience of unmasking Autism and how simply *acting Autistic* and refusing to concede to injustice changes the world.
- The Autistic Distinction, Kathleen Seidel. This speech illustrates the sanctity of Autism as a difference and definitively asserts that Autism is not a disease.
- <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-4/> (The Enneagram is a personality assessment system. Type 4 is the "individualist" or "creative" in that system.)
- Neuroclastic.com (The motto of this website is "The Autism Spectrum According To Autistic People.")
- "Hardcore, Soft Heart: Positive Activism As A Die-Hard Rebel", Ra Vashtar
- "Just be normal? That doesn't work!", Paul Micallef (Autism From The Inside) (YouTube short)
- REFERENCES TO MY OTHER WORK
- Neuroforestry And The Social Model Of Disability (Infodump, YouTube video), Lysander Keppta
- Never Mask Again (YouTube series), Lysander Keppta
- Singularity, Lysander Keppta (published in PenPoint 2022 Arts and Literary Magazine). I wrote this in late 2021 and early 2022 and used it both as a personal mission statement as an artist and as a discussion of the sublimity of art itself.

PART VIII-Inspirational quotes about Starflower ideals

“Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible⁸”

-Frank Zappa

“Art is a rebellion against the reality of its unfulfilled desire⁹”

-Emma Goldman

“We all die. The goal is not to live forever, the goal is to create something that will¹⁰”

-Chuck Palahniuk

“Individuality will always be one of the conditions of real elegance.¹¹”

-Christian Dior

“I would rather be hated for who I am than loved for who I am not¹²”

-Kurt Cobain

“If women want rights more than they’ve got, why don’t they just take them, and not be talking about it?¹³”

-Sojourner Truth¹⁴

“Here’s to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They’re not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can’t do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.¹⁵”

-Rob Siltanen

⁸ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/4408-without-deviation-from-the-norm-progress-is-not-possible>

⁹ <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1461030>

¹⁰ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/16831-we-all-die-the-goal-isn-t-to-live-forever-the>

¹¹ <https://quotefancy.com/quote/1164832/Christian-Dior-Individuality-will-always-be-one-of-the-conditions-of-real-elegance>

¹² <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/32121-i-d-rather-be-hated-for-who-i-am-than-loved>

¹³ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/5760-if-women-want-rights-more-than-they-got-why-don-t>

¹⁴ Truth made this statement at a women’s rights convention at a time and in a place where women could not vote and were either the property of their fathers or husbands or socially outcast as widows. While discrimination against neurodivergent people is much more subtle than the outright oppression of women in 19th-century America, the discrimination is nonetheless still there. I say to all neurodivergent people: if we want more rights than we have, why are we just talking about the privileges we want and the wrongs we want to see righted? Why don’t we just take ‘em? Why don’t we just directly act upon our neurodivergent traits and demand acceptance right there and then?

¹⁵ https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/14907567.Rob_Siltanen

“In the past, when people criticized me for asking unexpected questions (and by extension engaging in socially unexpected behaviors), I felt ashamed. Now I realize that ‘normal’ people are acting in a superficial and often false manner. So rather than let them make me feel bad, I express my annoyance. It’s my way of trying to strike a blow for logic and rationality.¹⁶”

-John Elder Robison

“Please spare a moment for all culturally well adjusted people, who are unable to speak about their many fears and the many sources of cognitive dissonance in their lives.¹⁷”

-Jorn Bettin

“Counterculture blooms whenever and wherever a few members of a society choose lifestyles, artistic expressions, and ways of thinking and being that wholeheartedly embrace the axiom that the only true constant is change itself.

The mark of counterculture is not a particular social form or structure, but rather the evanescence of forms and structures. Counterculture is the moving crest of a wave, the zone of uncertainty where culture goes quantum. Counterculture is the equivalent of Brownian Motion, where equilibrium and symmetry have given way to a complexity so intense as to appear to be chaos.

Participants in a counterculture thrive in this zone of turbulence. It is their native medium, the only clay malleable enough to shape and be shaped fast enough to keep up with the wild flashing of their inner visions.

In these configurations they reap the benefits of exchanging ideas through fast feedback in small groups, affording synergy that allows their thoughts and visions to grow almost the instant they are articulated.

In a sense, it is leaderless, in another sense, it is leaderful, with every participant leading the way.

The focus of counterculture is the power of artistic ideas and expression, not personal or political power.

It is the light, the shining forth of unfettered individual expression, the radiant effulgence of human activity unchained from external agendas and controls. It is the brilliance released when humans freely partake of inner and outer resources to shape the world in accordance with the authentic self.¹⁸”

-Timothy Leary

Now, who wouldn’t want *that*?

“People are going to find negative ways to cope, and, unfortunately, I was proximal to people in my life who also wanted to pursue those self-destructive activities (specifically drugs) as a means to cope. And it took me being introduced to a new environment to change it.

That environment was provided by Smith7, a nonprofit record label that puts on and promotes

¹⁶<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=john+elder+robison&commit=Search>

¹⁷ <https://neuroclastic.com/hypernormative-society-awareness-month/>

¹⁸ Sirius, R.U. and Goffman, Ken. *Counterculture Through The Ages: From Abraham To Acid House*, Villard Books, 2004, foreword pp. IX-X.

shows in Memphis to help local bands get established, turning any proceeds back into helping the label break even. It was there, at a house show, that Baker found the outlet that would come to define the rest of her high school years. At a house show dubbed “Wes Fest,” as attendees were encouraged to dress like their favorite character from a Wes Anderson film, a lonely, self-destructive girl found the place where she belonged.

“And I showed up and I was kind of scared, because it was high school [students] and a couple of college-aged people, and I was like, ‘There’s going to be beer and alcohol here,’ and I was really curious about it,” she recalls. “And then there wasn’t. [It was] the first time I had really encountered kids getting together on their own and doing things that were still countercultural and carving out their own reactive space but not having a party. It was so interesting to see a substance-free space, like, ‘Why? Why is it substance-free?’ and the guy who runs it, Brian [Vernon], who is still one of my best friends in the world, was like, ‘Because we’re here for music, and that’s all we’re here for.’ And that was a sentiment that I could totally hop on board with.”

“Night after night, show after show, Baker stood in people’s living rooms and shouted. Surrounded by friends on all sides—amps and drum kits up front, musicians standing face-to-face with their audience—these were not performances as much as they were paroxysms of collective catharsis. For the first time in her life, Baker felt like she was part of a community, and that interconnectedness made her want to see if she could give something back to everyone she felt understood and validated her. “I think it made me want to show up and try and not be flaky and self-destructive,” she says, “because it’s one of those things that was showing me that I’m not the only person in my life. What I do has a huge implication on all these other people, and I cannot go about my life being self-destructive in a self-pitying way, because I could do something constructive.”¹⁹

-Julien Baker

“Rules are not real unless they make sense”

-Anonymous

“Blind respect for authority and the reverence for the negative peace of accepting things “how they’ve always been” or “back in my day” or “because that’s not *normal*”— those things are killers. **Tear them down**”²⁰.”

-Terra Vance

¹⁹https://undertheradarmag.com/interviews/julien%20baker%20-%20the%20under%20the%20radar%20cove%20r_story/,

²⁰ <https://neuroclastic.com/suicide-and-autism/>

CONCLUSION:

I conclude with a quote from Percy Bysshe Shelley:

“To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From it's own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, not falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory²¹”

²¹ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Prometheus Unbound*. Black Box Press, 2007, page 91.